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Light on a New World

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Sign's for 1997

THE NEW YEAR is a time of anticipation! The old has gone, and for many people the new has the prospect of hope! There is a sense of optimism that with renewed effort, improvements will come. Is there a particular message from the Bible that can really stimulate this sense of optimism at the beginning of this year? Emphatically yes! The Bible contains many relevant statements of hope which support the prospect of a great future!

COUNTDOWN TO THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

The countdown has already begun for that turning point when the world will move into a new millennium. Excitement is building in peoples' minds that somehow there should be great changes, new enlightenment and a fresh start for better things for the human race. Where does this feeling come from? It is stimulated largely by the media. But the idea does come from the Bible, although most people only have a vague notion of what the Bible is all about. Briefly, it's as follows:

GOD'S 7000 YEAR PLAN WITH THE EARTH

The Bible opens with the record of the creation of life on earth as we know it in six days. On the seventh day, God saw that all His work was very good and He rested. Later on, God gave the Israelites a wise commandment to keep the seventh or Sabbath Day of each week as a day of rest and holiness to Him, as we read in the book of Genesis:

'For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.'¹

The Sabbath was a 'type' or 'pattern' of things to come. It pointed forward to a time when all the world will be at 'rest'. What is this Sabbath 'rest' which was represented by the seventh day of the creation week? It is the time of the Kingdom, described in the letter to the Hebrews and the

¹Exodus 20.11

book of Revelation, when Christ will reign for 1000 years.² This is the connection with the new millennium. We are nearing the end of 6000 years of human history. It is nearly 2000 years since the birth of Christ, and there were 4000 years before his birth, making a total of 6000 years of human rule. The Apostle Peter wrote, ‘...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.’³ In other words, each day of creation represented 1000 years of history. The final 1000 year period is represented by the Sabbath day when God rested. In the seventh millennium the whole world will be at rest!

No wonder there is this air of expectancy as we enter 1997! The sense of expectation as the new millennium approaches is significant! It portends huge changes for all nations. Jesus is about to return to take his place as King of the world. Just as at his first appearing we are told ‘...the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts...’⁴ so will it be at his second coming.

WHAT WILL 1997 MEAN TO YOU PERSONALLY?

Christadelphians began preaching the imminent return of Christ more than 150 years ago! Naturally, this has caused laughter among the scoffers! But we are not alone! Jesus spoke as if his Kingdom was imminent and so did his apostles! The most urgent message of Jesus is to watch and be ready, ‘...because you do not know on what day your Lord will come...’⁵ Paul said ‘The night is far spent, the day is at hand...’⁶ Almost the last words of the Bible are, ‘...Surely I come quickly....’ to which John replies, ‘...Even so, come, Lord Jesus.’⁷

Why has there been this sense of urgency for nearly 2000 years? Surely it is that Christ wants us to be waiting for him, living **as if** he could come at any time and interrupt whatever we are doing. This has the effect of making us more observant of our actions - are they kind and faithful? However, the secondary idea is that life is fleeting and we never know the day of our death. Christ likens his coming to that of a thief⁸ and a trap snapping shut.⁹ Not such a nice idea, is it? Especially when we compare it with Solomon’s words in Ecclesiastes which liken death to a snare!¹⁰ So we all have this very pressing, immediate problem. We all have our own personal ‘last days’. It won’t really matter to you what the Bible predicts if your doctor has told you to lose 25 kg immediately because you require a quadruple bypass!

²Hebrews 4.4-10: Revelation 20.6 ³2 Peter 3.8: Cp Psalm 90.4 ⁴Luke 3.15 ⁵Matthew 24.42 NIV ⁶Romans 13.12 ⁷Revelation 22.20 ⁸Revelation 16.15 ⁹Luke 21.35 ¹⁰Ecclesiastes 9.12

So our urgent advice is that you make 1997 the year you are going to find out about the purpose of life in relation to what God has planned as the 'rest' for the earth. Come to understand what Jesus accomplished in his death to pave the way for that 'rest' to become a reality and what you must do to become personally related to these important things.

1997 - SPEED AND CHANGE

The dizzying pace of modern life will continue to affect our lives, sometimes almost uncomfortably so. Surgery is being streamlined and perfected. Computer technology is revolutionising industry and warfare. But it is also enabling the Bible to go to every corner of the world. Ease of travel is enabling missionary work to spread the word of God everywhere. In contrast to this, nations can now view themselves at war with neighbours and see their own men being killed. Terrorist acts, earthquakes and hurricanes can be captured live on television. This blitz of news can have the effect of creating mass hysteria and paranoia. In fact, mental disorders, insomnia and depression are the maladies of the 1990's. Jesus predicted that at the time of his coming, '*Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world...*'¹¹ This statement had an uncanny ring of truth during the Gulf war!

Speed kills. The number one cause of death among younger people is sudden and unexpected events - by vehicle crashes, terrorism or murder. True, the world has avoided major wars for fifty years, but many people are dying in scary incidents and disasters, all reported in glorious technicolour by the sensation-loving media. The point we are making is that life is everything, but it can be cut short! God has given us the remedy in the gift of His Son. His plan will be fulfilled. It's up to us to act upon it!

1997 - 100 YEARS OF ZIONISM

Let's now examine the *major* sign which indicates that divine intervention in human affairs is imminent.

1997 marks exactly 100 years since the first Zionist Conference in Basle, Switzerland. These 100 years can nicely be split in half by the years 1947-48 when Israel declared herself a nation on the 14 May, 1948. Why is this so important? Simply because the dramatic return of Israel to their land and subsequent heartbreaking wars to retain their position confirms and vindicates belief in the Bible more than any other single fact in the world.

¹¹ Luke 21.26 NIV

These events happened against all odds! They were predicted more than 2500 years ago and by Jesus himself.¹² Israel is a witness to the truth of the Bible and that it has a message for this year! Here is a review of what has happened to date:

- 1917 - Palestine wrested from the Turks and declared a homeland for the Jews by the British Government in the famous 'Balfour Declaration'.
- 1917 to 1939 - Trickle of Jews returned to Palestine and began cultivating the land.
- 1939 to 1945 - Six million Jews were destroyed in the Holocaust in Europe. Survivors were rescued by the Allies and a home for them was urgently required.
- 1945 to 1948 - The plight of the Jews became a global embarrassment. In their extremity, they seized the window of opportunity and formed their own State in the land of Israel.
- 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 marked four wars when 60 million Arabs attempted to prove their boast that they would drive Israel into the sea. Israel was barely victorious, but still came under criticism for defending themselves!
- 1993 saw the signing of a historic peace pact with the Palestinians. Peace between Israel and the Arabs has been precarious ever since.

GOD REMEMBERS HIS LAND AND HIS PEOPLE

All of these events are the fulfilment of detailed Bible prophecy. God had declared that Israel would suffer a long dispersion in enemy lands, while the land of Israel would '*enjoy her Sabbaths*'. The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy describe this captivity. However, at the end of Leviticus chapter 26, God declares, '*I will remember... my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.*'¹³ Jeremiah and Ezekiel were Jewish prophets who foretold the return of the Jews to their land. Here are two extracts from their writings:

‘...I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to **the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.**’¹⁴

¹²Ezekiel 37: Luke 21.24 ¹³Leviticus 26.42 NIV ¹⁴Jeremiah 30.3

‘For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land... You will live in **the land I gave your forefathers...**’¹⁵

From these verses, we see that God’s interest is in **His land and His people**. We read in the book of Deuteronomy that God’s eyes are continually on His land from one end of the year to the other.¹⁶ He has never forgotten it. The Moslems maintain that the territory of Israel and Jerusalem belong to them. The Biblical prophets are emphatic that Israel was given to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob for ever. The land of Israel has been promised to Christ and his followers (the spiritual ‘descendants’ of Abraham) as their inheritance.¹⁷

The prophet Ezekiel goes on to say that with the return of the Jews to their land, God would:

‘...multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field...And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by (during the Moslem era)...I will increase them with men like a flock...so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men...’¹⁸

Israel has become the fruit basket of Europe, the fourth largest exporter of produce in the world. Her lands have become productive and her population has increased from a few thousand poverty-stricken Jews and Arabs in 1897 to 5.5 million in 1997. The facts are undeniable! They indicate a turn-around in the fortunes of Israel and the Jews. The change is too striking to ignore.

1997 - THE PRESENT PICTURE IN ISRAEL

Stormy discussion punctuated by terrorist attack is going on in Israel concerning the ownership of the holy places and the land itself. The Moslems and the Catholic Church are both vociferously claiming that Jerusalem is really theirs. In fact, the Catholics and Moslems appear to be presenting a united front against the Israelis. This is strange, considering that the original ambition of Mohammed was to remove the idol worshipping and trinitarian Catholics from Jerusalem!

¹⁵Ezekiel 36.24,28 NIV ¹⁶Deuteronomy 11.12 ¹⁷Genesis 13.14-17: Galatians 3.8, 27-29

¹⁸Ezekiel 36.30,34,37,38

Meanwhile the Jews have a very active religious 'right wing' which is planning the restoration of Old Testament based worship, complete with Temple, holy days and sacrifices! They bitterly oppose the westernisation of Israeli society and want to retain their heritage.

1997 could see these three groups in hostile confrontation!

1997 - WILL IT BE THE YEAR THAT THE JEWS ACCEPT CHRIST?

The same prophecies that foretell the return of the Jews to their land also stress another crucial aspect of God's plan in relation to these people. The Jews must undergo a change of heart toward God. So far they have returned in a spirit of nationalism, desperate to have a place to call their own. They want to trade and make money! Apart from the small religious minority, the Israelis are secular humanists with hardly any interest in their Bible and their God.

But God's plan for the Jews is predicted in these words:

'And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: **and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.**'¹⁹

'And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me...'²⁰

What will bring about this change of heart in Israel? What will turn them back to their Creator, Yahweh? Sadly, the prophets also foretell yet another defeat of Israel, and a further captivity. At this point, Jesus, the Messiah who the Jews do not recognise, will return to save them from annihilation and show himself their Saviour.

The prophet Zechariah predicts this event:

'For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. **Then** shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.'²¹

¹⁹Ezekiel 11.19,20 ²⁰Jeremiah 33.7,8 ²¹Zechariah 14.2,3

'And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined...they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.'²²

'And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him...and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn....'²³

Today's scene in the Middle East is set for the fulfilment of these words. The nations are burdened with the problem of the Jews and Arabs. There is no human solution!

The Jews are not the only ones who will undergo a change of heart. All nations will have the same experience! The Jews will mourn when they see Christ, and all nations will '*...wail because of him...*'²⁴ Then they will gladly accept Christ as their Saviour.

1997 - NOT FOR THE FAINTHEARTED

We have briefly reviewed expectations for this year: the anticipation of a new millennium, rapid changes, suddenness of events, media overkill, Bible prophecy being fulfilled in God's land and the imminent return of Jesus to set up a world government. Do all these things make us apprehensive? Not at all! God has invited all people to find safety in the hope of the Gospel and through belief and baptism, be related to a great future. '*...it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom...*'²⁵ The coming days will pass quickly. Make them days of opportunity! Make yourself a promise for 1997. Promise yourself that this year you will read the Bible through and find out what a great future God is offering you!

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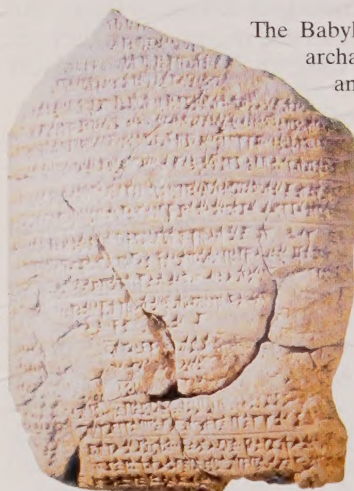
²²Zechariah 13.8,9 ²³Zechariah 12.10 ²⁴Revelation 1.7 ²⁵Luke 12.32

Bible Truths

ZEDEKIAH'S APPOINTMENT

IN THE BIBLE we are told about the last king who reigned over the ancient kingdom of Judah - King Zedekiah.¹ Interestingly Zedekiah was not his proper name; his real name was Mattaniah, the third son of King Josiah.² Although he was a prince in the royal house of Judah, the throne had passed from Josiah to Shallum, the fourth son,³ who was also known as Jehoahaz.⁴ It also records that Jehoahaz only reigned three months because the King of Egypt, Pharaoh-nechoh, deposed him and made his brother Eliakim king in Jerusalem, renaming him Jehoiakim.⁵

The Bible details the battles and the conquests that were taking place at this time (about 610 BC to 590 BC). The Egyptians and Babylonians were warring for supremacy and God's land was at times the battleground. King Jehoiakim reigned eleven years and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin.⁶ He too had a short reign being deposed by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, who then installed his uncle Zedekiah in his place.



The Babylonian Chronicles on clay tablets, dug up by the archaeologists in ancient Babylon some 2,500 years later and now available in the British Museum, can be used to verify the words written in the Scriptures. On the tablet shown here, the text records how Nebuchadnezzar appointed 'a king of his own choice, Zedekiah', after the capture of Jerusalem by his armies in 597 BC. Once again we see how valuable the archaeological record is in confirming for us the accuracy of God's Word.

One important point we must not miss is that the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell us how God used these Gentile conquerors to punish the evil and disobedient Kings of Israel and Judah. These two prophets recorded the end of Zedekiah's reign. Jeremiah tells us how Zedekiah and his sons were cruelly dealt with by the Babylonians,⁷ and Ezekiel foretold that the throne of Judah '*...shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.*'⁸ This is a prophecy of the second coming of Jesus to take the throne of Judah and to rule over the restored Kingdom of Israel which will be the centre of the Kingdom of God when Christ returns.⁹

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¹2 Kings 24.17-20; ²2 Chronicles 36.10,11 ³2 Kings 24.17 ⁴1 Chronicles 3.15; ⁵Jeremiah 22.11

⁶2 Kings 23.30,31 ⁷2 Kings 23.33-37 ⁸2 Kings 24.6 ⁹Jeremiah 39.5-7 ¹⁰Ezekiel 21.27

¹¹Acts 3.19-21

Bible Truths v Popular Christianity

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

YOU MAY BE puzzled by the title of this article. You may be thinking that the churches teach what is contained in the Bible. But how can you be sure of this?

In this series of articles we shall be examining some fundamental questions to see how the teaching of popular Christianity compares with what is actually written in the Word of God. This leads us to ask the question - is there life after death? It has been said, that, 'If there is one thing certain in this life it is that we all die'. Whether we be rich or poor or whatever part of the world we come from, one day we will die and there is no getting away from that.

WHAT POPULAR CHRISTIANITY TEACHES

Most churches teach that there is life after death and assert that death is the gateway to a better life. To prove this, they refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus. One church booklet on the subject of death tells us, 'Many people who are afraid of dying think they have to cling on to life. They look to Jesus who, according to them, could have hung on the cross for ten days or more. He didn't. The moment his work was done he said in effect, 'That's enough, it is finished!', and departed after only six hours on the cross'...'Jesus had no fear of death because he knew that there was nothing fearful about death.'

'Explaining What Happens After Death' by Roger Price page 9 (Pub. Sovereign World Ltd)

Bible passages such as the following quotation from John's Gospel record are often quoted at funerals to help comfort the sorrowing congregation:

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.'²

Another reference which is quoted in an attempt to prove there is life after death, comes from the letter to the Hebrews, where we read that '*...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*'³ This verse is used to show that there is no annihilation after death. The verse is also used to demonstrate that there is such a thing as reincarnation. It does not say 'Man is destined to die five times'. The verse tells us that man is destined to die once.

Popular Christianity uses the words of Jesus himself to teach that there is life after death: '*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live ... Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*'⁴

It is argued that the words '*They that hear*', must mean that those who have died will still have life and consciousness after death. It is also argued that 'If you do not have consciousness, you cannot hear!'

Reference is also made to the Old Testament, where in the Book of Daniel a similar statement is made:

'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.'⁵

It is claimed that these verses clearly demonstrate that there will be a resurrection from the dead for believers and unbelievers alike. It is asserted that the Bible tells us that anyone who has trusted in Christ will not know condemnation. 'Their works will be judged, but the Christian as

²John 14.1,2 NIV ³Hebrews 9.27 NIV ⁴John 5.25, 28,29 ⁵Daniel 12.2

an individual will not be judged and condemned.' This is backed up by a quotation from Paul's letter to the Romans where we read '*...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*'⁶

In Luke's Gospel record we find the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.⁷ This is used by popular Christianity to demonstrate the true meaning of the death state, as they see it. Let me just quote again what is written in the booklet 'Explaining What Happens After Death' concerning this parable: 'Both of these men have died and both are seen as conscious after death! This is very important. The Bible speaks of death in terms of sleep, but that normally refers to the physical body. Your physical body is said to go to sleep, but your soul is still conscious and awake and experiencing things after death. We will see what our souls are going to experience later on, but it is vital to see that after death we are still alert. The rich man and Lazarus were asleep as far as their physical bodies were concerned, but awake in their souls. In fact, this passage actually recounts a conversation which took place after the two men had died. They were conscious and able to feel, to reason, to see, hear and communicate. We all will be like this after death.'⁸

SUMMARY OF CHURCH TEACHING

From our consideration so far, we conclude that popular Christianity clearly teaches that there is life after death. Although our physical body decays, our souls go to heaven (or hell). There will be a judgement for ALL and that those who have believed on Jesus Christ will have nothing to fear at this judgement.

Is this really what is taught in the Bible? Or are the passages quoted taken out of their context? In answer to these questions, first of all let us consider this teaching found in Ecclesiastes:

'For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun...

...Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.'⁹

⁶Romans 8.1 NIV ⁷Luke 16.19-31 ⁸'Explaining What Happens After Death' page 11
⁹Ecclesiastes 9.5,6,10

Again the Psalmist wrote:

‘Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.’¹⁰

Many of the Psalms were written by King David, who we are told was a man after God’s own heart. And yet we read in the Acts of the Apostles that David is ‘*not ascended into the heavens...*’¹¹ One would have thought that he of all people would have been in heaven if that is the eternal abode of the faithful!

Popular Christianity teaches that there is nothing to fear in death. King Hezekiah, one of the kings of Judah, and a man who tried to live a good life and follow God’s commandments, was certainly fearful of death. We read that when he was very ill and near death, he prayed: ‘*...Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.*’¹² These are not the words of a man who was about to enter the gateway to a better life. No, he was fearful, he wept long and hard and prayed that his life would be lengthened. On this occasion, we are told that God heard his prayer and his life was extended for a further fifteen years. In thanksgiving to God he uttered these words:

‘Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day:....’¹³

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE SOUL

You may have noticed in that verse that Hezekiah referred to his soul being delivered from the grave. What did he mean by this?

In the Old Testament the word soul is translated from the Hebrew word ‘nephesh’ and in the New Testament from the Greek word ‘psuche’. Both these words simply mean ‘animal’ or ‘creature’. In the very first chapter of Genesis we read that on the fifth day of creation God created the moving creatures. That word ‘creature’ is the Hebrew word ‘nephesh’

¹⁰Psalm 146.3,4 ¹¹Acts 2.34 ¹²Isaiah 38.3-5 ¹³Isaiah 38.17-19

and can also be translated 'soul'. If we look at the next chapter of Genesis we read in verse seven that '*man became a living soul*' or '*living creature*'. In the Book of Leviticus chapters four and five we are told that a soul can 'see', it can 'touch' and it can 'swear'. In the book of Proverbs we further read that a '*soul can be hungry*'¹⁴ And in the Psalms we are told that a '*soul can wait*' and a '*soul can thirst*'¹⁵ Again in the 22nd Psalm we read that '*...none can keep alive his own soul*'¹⁶ But it is the prophet Ezekiel who sums the whole matter up when he says: '*The soul that sinneth, it shall die...*'¹⁷

In the New Testament, too, we cannot find a reference to souls going to heaven. The Greek word 'psuche' is translated as 'soul' or 'life'.

Here is an example from Matthew's gospel record:

'For whosoever will save his life (psuche) shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life (psuche) for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (psuche) or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (psuche)'¹⁸

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

We have already considered how popular Christianity uses this parable, to confirm the idea of heaven going at death. This parable makes use of what the Pharisees (a sect of the Jews) believed concerning the state of the dead. Their beliefs are well documented by such historians as Josephus, who was himself a Pharisee. Jesus was addressing them, and it was natural and effective that he should make use of their view of what happens after death. But by using their beliefs in this parable Jesus is by no means endorsing them. Lazarus was typical of many Jews of his day. They were deprived of even the most meagre crumbs of the bread of life from the rich man's table. The rich man in this parable points to the High Priest, Caiaphas, who is condemned in the parable for his selfish, irresponsible conduct, in neglecting the spiritual and material needs of the people. The five brothers mentioned in the parable are the five brothers of Caiaphas. They thought that they were following their ancestor Abraham. But as the parable tells us, they had rejected the teachings of Moses and the prophets nor would they respond if someone rose from the dead.

¹⁴Proverbs 19.15 ¹⁵Psalm 62.1; Psalm 63.1 ¹⁶Psalm 22.29 ¹⁷Ezekiel 18.20

¹⁸Matthew 16.25,26

The literal death and reviving of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, who was a close friend of Jesus, further antagonised the Pharisees, and Caiaphas the high priest, in particular. Again, in this account of Lazarus, which is found in the eleventh chapter of John's gospel record, we ask the question: if the soul of Lazarus had gone into heaven, into some place of eternal bliss, why did Jesus bring him back to life again? There can only be one answer to this question - The dead do **not** go to heaven!

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

We have already considered that popular Christianity uses the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as proof that all will be resurrected. If we look into this we see that this is not the case. Christ's death and resurrection does give hope of eternal life, but not in the way the churches would have us believe.

In the chapter we quoted earlier from John's record which is used at funerals, it also tells us that, although Jesus has gone into the heavens, and he is the only one who has, the next verse goes on to say that '*...I WILL COME AGAIN...*'¹⁹ This clearly speaks of the second coming of Jesus Christ to the EARTH.

It is through this second coming, which we firmly believe will be very soon, that the believer can have the true hope of eternal life. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans:

'...the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'²⁰

Yes, eternal life is a gift from God through Jesus Christ, and it is conditional as we read in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.'²¹

To be '*in Christ*' means to be baptised into Jesus Christ. Again, Paul wrote to the Romans:

¹⁹John 14.3 ²⁰Romans 6.23 ²¹1. Corinthians 15.22,23

‘Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.’²²

To walk in ‘*newness of life*’ means a ‘fresh start’. Even then we must follow Christ’s commandments:

‘If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.’²³

Following a belief in the true Gospel message the next step is to be baptised into Christ.

‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’²⁴

‘...ye... are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit.’²⁵

This is God’s spiritual house in which are many abiding places. It is only those who have been baptised into Christ, (that is by full immersion in water), who will have hope of eternal life when Jesus Christ returns to set up God’s kingdom on earth.

When he comes there will then be a judgement of those who have known the true Gospel. Those who have only followed man’s teaching will not be raised. They will remain in the grave.

Isn’t it time to look into these things in more detail so that you can have hope of obtaining this precious gift of eternal life?

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²²Romans 6.3-5 ²³John 15.10 ²⁴John 3.16 ²⁵Ephesians 2.19-23

THE CASTAWAY

A CASTAWAY ON a desert island gets up every morning and walks all the way around his island looking out to sea, searching an empty horizon. He has already piled together wood and leaves ready to light as a beacon for when he sees any sign of a passing ship. Day after day he keeps up his lonely vigil as the years slip by.

One day, as the castaway is making his usual circuit his patience is finally rewarded. Over to the East he can just make out the unmistakeable shape of a sail. 'At last' he cries 'I'm saved!' Of course at that point the castaway isn't *really* saved at all. Any number of things could go wrong. The castaway might be unable to get the beacon to light. The lookouts on the ship might be too preoccupied with other things to spot the smoke from the beacon, or it may be an enemy ship! Even assuming the ship does find the castaway he is still not saved in a complete sense until he is back home with his family perhaps many months later, assuming of course that the ship which has picked him up does not itself founder on the way back! Yet the castaway is full of joy because what he has seen is the *means* of his salvation, appearing and getting closer all the time, so who can blame him for his elation.

Perhaps this is how the Apostle Paul felt when he told his young helper Timothy about his faith in God '*who has saved us and called us with a holy calling...*'¹ or when he told his friend Titus about that same God, '*...according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;*'²

There are many other examples of this great confidence Paul had in the salvation of the righteous, speaking of it as fact, as if the battle was already won.³ Jesus also spoke in the same way to encourage the faithful,⁴ for an army marching into battle will not do very well unless it is confident of victory.

Yet Jesus also taught that no-one is certain to be saved until the time of judgement.⁵ Paul wrote that salvation involves much more than jumping up in euphoria at a distant prospect.⁶ We would be mistaken to take our salvation as something which has already happened. The believer sees through the eye of faith the means of that salvation, which is nearer now than when the believer first believed.⁷

So Paul himself was anxious to keep strong in faith '*...lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*'⁸

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¹2 Timothy 1.9 NKJV ²Titus 3.5 ³Acts 16.31, Romans 5.9; Ephesians 2.8,9

⁴John 6.47; 10.28 ⁵Matthew 10.22; 25.31-46 ⁶1 Corinthians 15.2; Philippians 2.12; 1 Timothy 4.16 ⁷Romans 13.11 ⁸1 Corinthians 9.27

In the Footsteps of Christ (3)

IN THIS THIRD article which continues the account of the journeys of Jesus during his ministry, we begin our review at Galilee, where Jesus had gone up into the mountain and delivered the famous 'Sermon on the Mount'. As we saw in the last article, he preached to his disciples and those with ears to hear, the way to the kingdom of God, which will shortly be set up upon the earth at the return of Jesus.

PREACHING THE KINGDOM

After the 'Sermon on the Mount' Jesus began a very intensive preaching campaign throughout the whole of the Galilee region. Through his mighty works he had already showed openly the power of God, and this had given him the authority which he professed, that he was the Son of God. He showed that the works which he performed were given to him by God and that his purpose was to do the will of the Father. Here Jesus made it plain that he was not God himself, but the Son of God, who came to do the Father's will.¹ Having shown these mighty works he then went about the whole region carrying out his main mission prior to his sacrifice. *'...he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings (Gospel) of the kingdom of God...'*²

The disciples accompanied Jesus on this mission, as did also certain women who ministered unto him. This touching detail recorded by Luke in chapter 8 shows us that Jesus was a man just like us, with needs, and particularly in need of companionship and warmth. The world outside his little circle was hostile, even amongst those who came to see his great miracles, and Jesus knew that overall his message of salvation would not immediately be grasped, and that soon he would be put to death for his

¹John 5.30 ²Luke 8.1

ministering work. We note in passing that even the Son of God needed companionship, as all the servants of God have done down the ages. So in the mercy of God, these loving companions were given to him for his preaching work throughout Galilee.³

In Capernaum Jesus healed a blind and dumb man (who many thought was demon-possessed), and was opposed by the Pharisees, who accused him of being possessed by a demon himself. Jesus now began to stir up opposition in the Galilee area, as the religious leaders wanted him out of the way. Jesus did not evade the issue, but on a number of occasions exposed these leaders openly before the multitude as hypocrites (play actors), who made an outward show, yet perverted the Word of God for their own profit. So besides preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, at the same time he had to counter the fierce opposition of the spiritual leaders of the Jews who hated him. It would seem that here, in Capernaum, his mother and his brothers came on to the scene to try to protect him and get him away from the crowds and to take him back home, but Jesus would have none of it. In that famous remark he said *'... Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother'*⁴

His work needed to go on, and together with his small band of followers, who had now become his family, he went down to the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

AT GALILEE

This of course was familiar territory for some of the disciples, who had been fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, and they knew it well. The Sea of Galilee is actually a lake about 21 kilometres long and about 11 kilometres wide. It lies 211 metres below sea level, and thus has a 'micro-climate' of its own. Fed by the river Jordan, its waters are 'sweet', unlike the salty Dead Sea. It is teeming with fish, and its fisheries were well known throughout the Roman empire due partly to its flourishing export trade. As it is situated below sea level in a rift valley, surrounded by hills, sudden storms can whip up the waters of the lake into a frenzy without warning.

³John 17.6 ⁴Matthew 12.48-50

Here Jesus sat down by the Sea, at Capernaum, and great multitudes followed him, forcing him to sit in a boat, a little way from shore. There, as they stood in a crowd on the shore he spoke many things to them in parables. Perhaps Jesus could see in the distance a sower scattering the seed by hand, which gave him his cue for the parable of the sower, who sowed the Word of God. The hearers, likened to the ground, either received the Word or did not receive it. They either brought forth fruit, or did not, preferring the things of this world instead. These parables, understandable to those who have ‘*ears to hear*’, even to this day, give the servants of God much encouragement in their daily lives to heed and to obey the Word of God, and to bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

Here, by the Sea of Galilee Jesus told many parables, showing what the kingdom of God would be like, telling his disciples of the judgements of God which would separate the wheat from the tares, showing how powerful and beautiful would be the kingdom, and likening the setting up of the kingdom to the harvest time.

THE STORM

At the end of the day, Jesus told his disciples to go by boat to the other side of the lake. It had been an exhausting day and he now needed rest from the crowds. So the disciples sent away the multitude, and entered the ship. Even then there were other little ships with them, showing it to be nearly impossible for Jesus to get away from the crowds. Jesus settled down in the small vessel and went to sleep towards the stern of the ship. Soon a great storm of wind arose, and the waves filled the ship, causing it to begin to sink. Jesus, who was exhausted slept on, until the disciples, terrified, woke him with the words ‘...*Master, carest thou not that we perish?*’⁵ They perceived that nobody but Christ could save them. As fishermen no doubt, they had lost relatives and friends who had perished under such circumstances over the years.

The record tells us that Jesus ‘... *arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*’⁶ What a contrast, what power and might! Jesus rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith, and opened-mouthed they could only exclaim

⁵Mark 4.38 ⁶Mark 4.39



*'...What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'*⁷ In the Scriptures the sea and the waves represent nations and peoples, and in Luke 21 Jesus shows us that a sign of his second coming is the sea and the waves roaring and men's hearts failing them for fear. Just like here on Galilee, when it literally happened. And as Jesus calmed the sea and the waves, so when he returns to set up the kingdom, and says *'Peace, be still'*, the sea, representing peoples and nations, will once again be tranquil.

THE DISCIPLES SENT OUT

From Galilee he went to Nazareth, his home town, where he preached on the Sabbath day in the synagogue. The people regarded him as the carpenter, the son of Mary and they failed to understand that he was the Son of God. Jesus could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Now was the time for the disciples themselves to experience the power manifested in Jesus, and to go out and to preach the kingdom without him. So Jesus sent them away in pairs, giving them specifically the power to heal, telling them to take nothing for their

⁷Mark 4.41

journey. So they went out, as he had done, with no comforts or possessions, and preached that men should repent, and they healed many of their illnesses. This gave them a sense of elation, as we see on one occasion when they reported back to Jesus the mighty works that they had been able to perform.⁸

About this time, John the Baptist was killed by the command of Herod, because he had told Herod in no uncertain terms that it was not lawful for him to marry his brother's wife, Herodias. The time had now come for John to leave the scene, as he had faithfully carried out his mission. Jesus and his disciples gathered together, and they related to him the news of his cousin's death, and at the same time told him about their marvellous powers of healing.

Jesus invited them to go with him away from the crowds into a desert place to rest awhile; so they took ship and came to the other side of the lake. But having arrived at the other side, again a great crowd had gathered (5,000 men, we are told) having anticipated the likely landing



⁸Luke 10.17

spot of Jesus and had run on foot from the local villages. We can picture the news going from house to house, of Jesus, heading by boat to one of the shores of the Sea, and they arrived there before him. This is one of the more touching accounts of those who still wanted to be with Jesus, who clamoured to hear him and to see his miracles.

Jesus, on seeing them was moved with compassion toward them, as they were like sheep not having a shepherd, and so he began to teach them many things. They stayed and heard him gladly, until the day wore on and it was heading towards dusk. The disciples, no doubt exhausted and hungry, counselled Jesus to send the crowds away to buy some food. '*...Give ye them to eat...*',⁹ commanded Jesus to the disciples, who, perplexed, answered that it would need 200 day's wages to buy enough bread. Jesus told them to see how many loaves they had, and after enquiry they were able to produce five loaves and two fishes. With these Jesus fed the multitude, filling them all, and taking up twelve baskets of fragments that were left. This miracle gives confidence to all the disciples of Christ that if they desire truly God's words, then they will be filled, they will be provided for, like the sparrows and the other creatures of God. But we must have faith.

JESUS WALKS ON WATER

After the multitude was fed, Jesus immediately urged his disciples to get back into the ship and to go to the other side of the lake to Bethsaida, whilst he stayed to send away the crowds. This done, and the crowd dispersed, Jesus went into a mountain to pray. The disciples meanwhile tried to row to the other side but the wind was against them. They were making slow progress, and hours later they were weary indeed from rowing. Imagine their amazement as Jesus walked towards them on the water, and started to pass by them. They cried out, terrified, thinking it was an apparition, but immediately Jesus calmed them down with the words, '*...Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid*'.¹⁰

In fact Peter answered and said '*...Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water*'.¹¹ Jesus invited Peter to do this and for a short while Peter performed this miracle, until his faith gave way, and he began to

⁹Mark 6.37 ¹⁰Mark 6.50 ¹¹Matthew 14.28

sink. ‘...Lord, save me!’¹² Peter’s words to Jesus are the same as all the servants of God, who, down the centuries have looked to Christ for salvation, and who need saving from death. We can have the same assurance that Peter had, as Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, with the words ‘...O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?’¹³ Immediately the wind ceased, and they were amazed and wondered. The disciples exclaimed ‘...Of a truth thou art the Son of God’.¹⁴

Truly these signs, all with their spiritual significance are given to us in the Bible to show us the way to eternal life and to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that in believing we might have life through his Name.

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¹²Matthew 14.30 ¹³Matthew 14.31 ¹⁴Matthew 14.33

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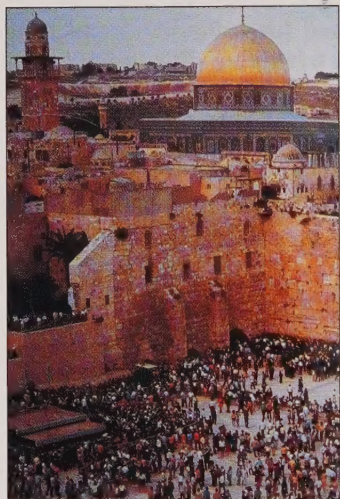
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COVER PICTURE



THE PICTURE OF Jerusalem illustrates vividly the divisions that exist in God's Holy Land. In the foreground is the Western Wall, the place where Jews meet and pray and this is all that remains of the Temple Mount where King Solomon's temple stood and later, in the time of Jesus, Herod's Temple also held pride of place. On the temple area itself stands the Mosque of Omar, with its famous golden dome, where the Arab Muslim population gather for prayer and worship.

The view of these places of worship reminds us that Israel today is a divided and troubled land with Jew and Palestinian Arab each vehemently claiming Jerusalem as their capital city!

Then of course, we have a third major religion, Christianity, that claims Jerusalem as the centre of their hopes! So the picture symbolises confusion, argument and tension. They talk peace and then fight each other!

Will it ever change? We are in no doubt that it will change.

God's word tells us clearly that Christ is coming again to this earth to rule from Jerusalem *'He (Jesus) will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest and the LORD God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'*¹

All those who hold God's Word dearly should be aware of these promises about Jesus and should be longing and hoping that 1997 will be the year when the coming of Jesus brings peace and happiness not only to a troubled Israel, but to a troubled world also. *'...He will teach us his ways...For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations...Neither shall they learn war any more.'*²

¹Luke 1.31-33 NKJV ²Isaiah 2.3,4 NKJV

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